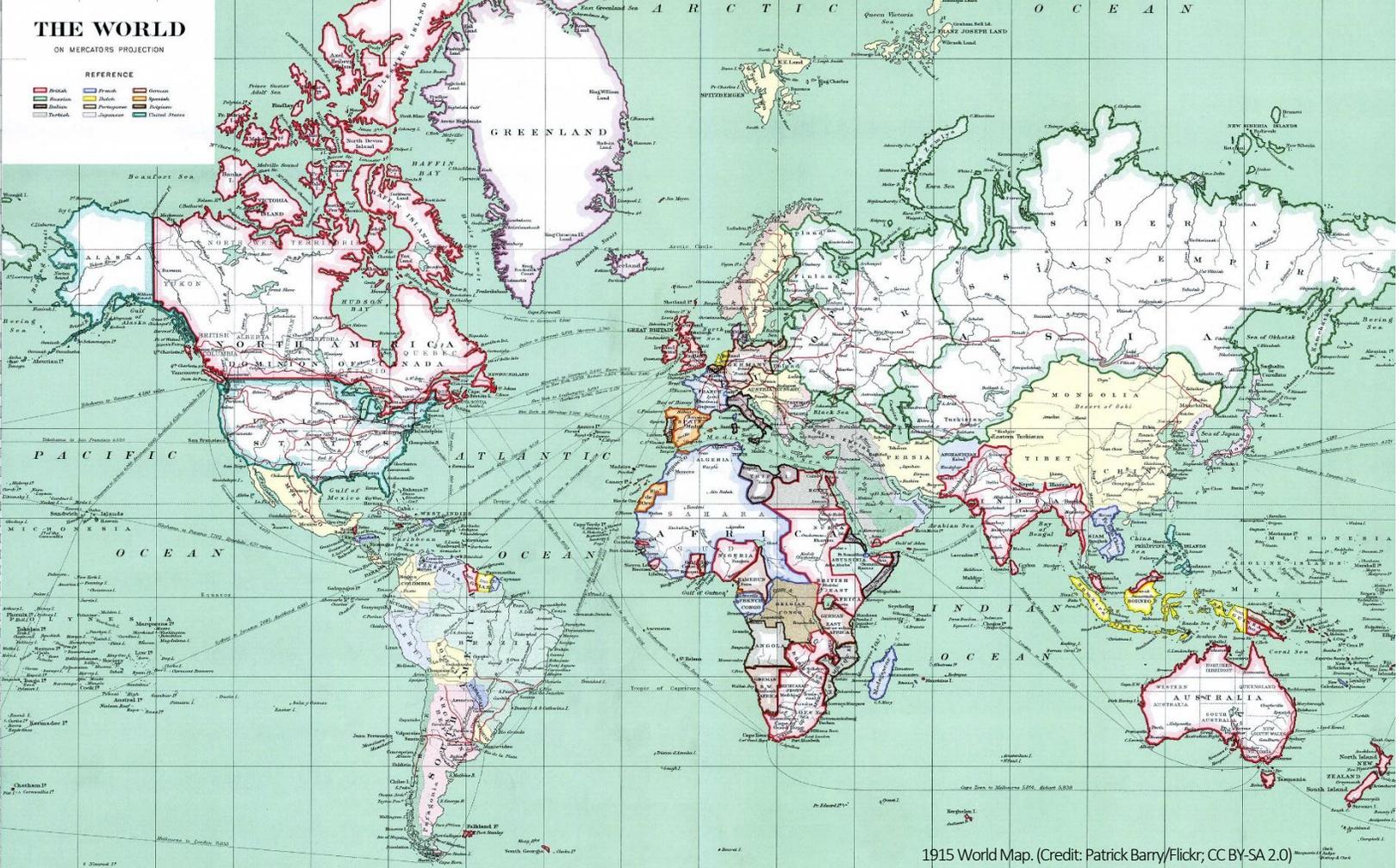


THE WORLD

ON MERCATOR'S PROJECTION

REFERENCE

British	French	German
Russian	Dutch	Spanish
Italian	Portuguese	Japanese
Turkish	United States	



1915 World Map. (Credit: Patrick Barry/Flickr; CC BY-SA 2.0)

Expert Comment

Will there be order in the world?

Alexey Malashenko



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Will there be order in the world?

By Alexey Malashenko

It is hard to say how the world order will be reshaped and whether it will result in any order at all. There have been multiple attempts to restructure the world order throughout history. With the Peace of Westphalia in 1638, the great powers decided to create an aligned system of international relations (a sort of prototype of the United Nations). This was followed by the 1814-1815 Congress of Vienna, the 1918 Treaty of Versailles, and the Yalta Conference in 1945. With the multilateral agreements that followed World War II, signatories assumed the durability of this new system of international relations, a stance that benefitted both the collective interests of the great powers as well as their individual national interests.

The sense that a final and permanent world order was being established began with the creation of the League of Nations (1919-1946) and was solidified with its successor, the United Nations Organization (1947). Though seen as appointed guarantors of the world order, both organisations had mainly a subordinate role in world policy. Their legal capacity was limited. The League of Nations was unable to stop World War II (the organisation was largely impotent by 1939). As for the UN, it has failed to prevent a single major conflict, and its actions remain merely palliative. The UN Security Council is fully incapable, as its decisions are merely recommendations in nature. This 'guarantor' of the world order was unable to prevent the hundreds of conflicts and wars that broke out after World War II, which killed over 10.5 million people (Pettersson and Wallensteen, 2015).

The most stable order thus far seems to be the bipolar world of the second half of the 20th century, one which relied on the ability of the two great powers – the United States and the Soviet Union – to threaten annihilation of the other. However, this bipolar order was a priori doomed, as the Soviet pole hopelessly lagged behind the economic competitiveness of the West.

After this world order collapsed in the early 1990s, the new world order can be viewed in three dimensions: unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar. But in the author's opinion, all the three variants are unsatisfactory.

The most popular variant of the current order is 'multipolarity', regarded by many politicians and experts as a solution to hegemony and as a path to geopolitical equality (the latter is arguably an indisputable utopia). According to one theory, these poles are, and should remain, the five normative foreign policy actors: Europe, India, Russia, the US, and China (Nathalie Tocci, 2008).

However, the reality seems more complex than this interpretation of multipolarity, and the number of poles is not limited to the powers mentioned above.

I cannot say what Europe's attitude to multipolarity is, but venture to argue that it looks at multipolarity as autonomy, even independence, from the United States. There is no single European pole. Europe is multipolar in itself, as it is home to co-existing national poles – German, French, British, Eastern European, etc. With some degree of convention, Europe can be considered as a kind of civilisational pole, but not a political one.

The idea of a multipolar world looks attractive to non-European countries with medium political weight. These include Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, South Africa, Brazil, to some extent, India. The criteria to classify this or that state under the 'medium' category is loose, hence the ambiguity of the definition itself. One such criterion is their willingness to show their independence from the 'great powers' – the United States, and to a lesser degree China and Russia.

However, Russia might be categorised as a medium power, with a GDP ranked 11th or 13th in the world. The Kremlin supposes that in the multipolar background, Russia will preserve a special status and will remain an exclusive pole. However, it may also get lost in the multipolar world of medium powers, where it is enough to claim global influence by wielding nuclear weapons and owning hydrocarbons.

Based on the violent activity of medium powers, the multipolar world is already here and it will continue to exist in the future. Multipolarity drives 'conflictogenity' on a regional and eventually global level. A visible example is the conflict in Syria and along its borders. The conflict that started in 2011 is expanding like a ripple in a pond, moving to a regional level, and considering the involvement of external actors, as well as the resultant massive migration to Europe, to a global level. The overlapping interests of several powers are hindering attempts to resolve the situation, and it seems that the conflict will not be addressed in the near term. Not a single 'pole' wishes to give in, nor do they have evident superiority or a decisive say. The Syrian conflict is the first multipolar conflict of the 21st century. It is a scary thought that something of this kind is more than likely to occur elsewhere in the world.

Another question is whether poles will ever be formed by influential or ambitious international organisations, such as the EU, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), League of Arab States (LAS), or Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). This seems unlikely though, as a true pole or power must be highly consolidated. This leaves out the increasingly fragmented EU, and the SCO will not emerge as great power because its members are united in the fight against international terrorism, but no more than that. BRICS will not form a pole as it is not trying to seriously act as a singular front. And no poles were, or will be, formed by the OIC and LAS, which are overwhelmed by internal schisms and contradictions and have never been able to become adequate subjects of world politics throughout their history. As for the EEU, this institution exists under Russia with all that it implies, and its separate polarity is an illusion.

Unipolarity

Multipolarity is opposed by two variants of the world order arrangement. The first one is unipolarity. In a unipolar world within the current geopolitical context, only the US can play

the role of the unassailable 'single hegemon'. But there is about the United States' domination of the global economy. According to some estimates, the US GDP makes up 15.5% of global GDP; according to others it's 24%. The GDP of the United States' major opponent, China, is 15-17%. When also including Japan and EU countries, there is hardly any argument that the US is the economic powerhouse of the world. Therefore, there is no economic unipolarity, nor does it seem to ever emerge. We cannot see the unipolarity of the US in a political context, either.

It looks as though this unipolarity is not too popular among the US elite. Yes, it is psychologically pleasing for the US establishment to feel as though they are leading the world; it does tickle vanity, but Americans are not ready to relentlessly struggle for it. They probably feel that its gradual loss is inevitable. This is the paradox.

This inconsistency is reflected in the behaviour of Donald Trump who became President, but at the same time remains a businessman. He faces the dilemma of how to match the economic interests of the US with its status as a global leader. It seems that it is more convenient for the US not to 'head' the world but rather to be a 'global supervisor and advisor' whose opinion cannot be disregarded. It is this position that was taken by Trump, and will likely follow, but to a lesser degree, with his successors.

There is no total dominance of the US. The US is not notching victories in Afghanistan, and their role is not solely decisive in the conflict in Syria. US ambitions irritate Europe. The EU, though becoming a little fragmented over the last decade, will do its best to be an independent actor rather than an obedient puppet of the US. In August 2018, Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, has said that "Europe and the US have parted ways for a long time" (Maas, 2018).

However, hegemonic claims are shown violently by US politicians with regard to Russia. Irrespective of the particular reasons for their anti-Russian line, including sanctions, it seems that the anti-Russian bias on the part of some US politicians contains a certain

degree of inertial anti-Sovietism, some kind of late revenge. This kind of historical memory is long-lived in the American mentality. Without justifying Russia's behaviour, we cannot help noting that the US efforts to humiliate it look provincial (simultaneously, all of this contributes to the propagation of the idea of Russia as a besieged fortress, and this inevitably requires rallying the society behind the power).

As for China, it does not recognise the unipolarity of the US or simply disregards it. The 'Americanisation' of the world order is also rejected in Muslim countries, India, and Latin America.

There is another curious thing. Despite the 'Ameriphobia' that exists in the world, a part of the planet will still accept the US variant of unipolarity since such an order will allegedly ensure stability. In simple words, peace in the world is guaranteed only under a single absolute 'master'. Well, this position is clear. Many people on Earth would like to have a master as it makes it easier to live. But these people will be disappointed: no unipolar American world, a de facto dictatorship, can be expected in the 21st century.

Bipolarity

The second vision is a bipolar world. Assuming the United States is one pole, China then is the other. It flatters Beijing but has no sense to it. A US-China bipolarity does not entail any benefits for the PRC as it requires a constant show of confrontation and military power. The previous bipolar world was built on the US-Soviet nuclear parity. Beijing does not strive to reach this parity. Chinese leaders remember the USSR crashing and collapsing in the course of the arms race. Chinese pragmatists are more clever than Kremlin dreamers.

An ideological confrontation of the two poles is pointless since ideological trends co-exist in parallel now. And while Chinese society shows interest for 'foreign' ideas, the West views China's official political ideology as a half-crumbled communist relic.

One more reason why China will not become a political pole of gravity is the growing fear of the nation. China's economic activity in Southeast and Central Asia and in other regions fuels the fear of Chinese expansion, the desire to ward off the political dependence of China, and efforts to protect a country's sovereignty.

Sinophobia in Central Asia is symptomatic of this wariness of Chinese influence and power. Many societies in the region to the west of China are irritated by the fact that Chinese construction projects almost exclusively (90%) employ Chinese workers because local workers do not have adequate qualifications. There are fears in Tajikistan that Chinese credits will have to be paid for with natural resources or even territory. According to sociologists in the region, in 2007, 18% shared negative attitudes to Chinese migrants, and this figure rose to 33% in 2012 and 46% in 2017 (Pankratenko, 2018).

There is also an opinion gaining support, which argues local governments 'sell' their countries to China for bribes, which hampers local business.

Finally, a US-China bipolar world order is unacceptable for Russia, which would become a secondary, peripheral power in this case and whose geopolitical role will be limited to support China with its nuclear arsenal. We should not expect the arrival of a second geopolitical pole to rival the US; there will be no bipolar world.

Looking forward

The nation-state will remain the key actor in the world order, a world built on reliable and understandable relations. The 'crowd of states' will mainly be concerned with its own problems and consider its neighbours, partners, and international organisations only as instruments to protect and promote its national interests. On the one hand, in this world the responsibility of each individual state, be it a 'big', 'medium' or 'small' nation, will grow. On the other hand, such a responsibility will act in concert with national egoism and efforts to use global chaos for the benefit of each state's own ambitions. We will arguably see the

growth of nationalistic sentiment everywhere – in Europe, Russia, and the US, as well as in other parts of the world.

This trend explains the relatively weak and sporadic interest in the modernisation of international organisations. In turn it contributes to the emergence of temporary, ad hoc, and fragile coalitions and alliances that will strengthen and later weaken and disappear. This is something that can already be observed.

The chaos in the world order is aggravated by differences between political systems and ideologies that can be, with some degree of convention, divided into two types: democratic and authoritarian. (Totalitarianism is a historical reserve, a kind of Jurassic park.)

The coexistence of authoritarian and democratic regimes is eternal. Authoritarian regimes are gradually tapping into democratic institutions, continuing talks in the West about the need to strengthen the role of the state and tighten laws (one of the reasons behind this is the trouble caused by the migration of Muslims to non-Muslim societies). At the same time, there will be no convergence of political systems, and in the 21st century we will not see any 'average' system, suitable for all societies. Relations between democratic and authoritarian regimes will depend on mutual interest, even consensus, of radically different governance structures. We had all this with bipolarity, but the situation was much simpler then.

The formation of the world order is in many ways defined by civilisational differences that engender civilisation polemics, a phenomenon that is growing and even becoming more intense. Endless debates on values, morals, democracy, human rights, on state mandated compliance with civilisational norms do not help trust or relations in the world.

The formation of a single human civilisation continues. But this is a painstaking and long process, and no one can say when such a civilisation will be realised. The journey asymptomatic, and in the meantime each 'local' civilisation strives to prove, openly or implicitly, that its traditions and values are better than those of its neighbours. Examples can

be found anywhere. The Christians insist on their superiority, as a minimum, with reference to its material success. Muslims proceed from the idea of the ultimate, most perfect monotheism at its core, and its economic lag is just temporary and can be explained by its youth, and also by aggressive practices of Christians.

The 'struggle of civilisations' will continue well into the 21st century. This is fuelled by the politicisation of religions, which has been increasing in the past decades, a process is characteristic of all monotheistic ideologies. Each religion, and each civilisation, proposes its own model of a world order together with a state order. This is seen most vividly in the Muslim world, where Islamists struggle to realise the 'Islamic alternative' an Islamic state as its quintessence. We are not speaking about the particular IS whose actions, especially terrorism, discredit this idea, but about some ideal state built in accordance with the ethical norms of the community created in 7th century Arabia by the Prophet Muhammad.

A state built on religious foundations can be viewed as a utopia. But millions of Muslims believe in it, and we cannot ignore their faith: that is simply dangerous. As a reminder, millions of people believed in communism until fairly recently, and this belief was paid attention to even by hostile skeptics. The desire to build an Islamic state, and any attempts to build one, will inevitably influence the formation of the world order. Islamism as a religious and political movement is becoming a kind of pole itself, a subject of foreign policy.

The latest information technologies contribute to a stronger civilisational factor as a driver for the formation of the world order. It seems that such technologies should, on the contrary, mitigate the acuteness of civilisation differences. But it is not that simple. On the one hand, technologies facilitate globalisation, 'averaging-out' civilisations, and on the other hand, they help support and consolidate religious and civilisational identities. We can see a cumulative effect. The brightest and saddest example was the use of such technologies by the Islamic State.

Considering the above, one starts thinking inadvertently about the kind of politicians that will be in greater demand in an unpredictable world order. It looks like these will include nationalists, and their nationalism will be more than ever reliant on religious and cultural identities. It will not be the classical nationalism of the late 19th and 20th centuries, but it will be defined as a synthetic 'civilisational nationalism', based on simultaneously belonging to a nation and its civilisation. In different situations, the correlation of identities, national and civilisational, will vary.

It would be reasonable to pay attention to the age of present-day politicians. On the whole, they may be divided into two categories: those whose political mentality took shape before 1991 – before the collapse of the bipolar world – and those who do not belong to the cold war generation. We cannot enumerate all of them, but several names are worth mentioning. The following are examples of 'young' politicians

- President of France Emmanuel Macron, born in 1977, President since 2017
- Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez (1972, 2018)
- Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (1986, 2017)
- Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel (1975, 2014)
- Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte (1967, 2010)
- President of Poland Andrzej Duda (1972, 2015)
- Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán Viktor (1963, first became Prime Minister in 1998)

The second category includes older politicians:

- President of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika, born in 1937, President since 1999)
- President of South Africa Jacob Zuma (1942, 2009)
- President of Iran Hassan Rouhani (1948, 2013)

- Chairman of the People's Republic of China Xí Jìnpíng (1953, 2013) President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin (1952, 2000)
- Prime Minister of Great Britain Theresa May (1956, 2016)
- Prime Minister of Sweden Stefan Löfven (1957, 2014)
- German Chancellor Angela Merkel (1954, 2005)
- President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (1954, in power as either Prime Minister or President since 2003)
- President of Indonesia Joko Widodo (1961, 2014)
- President of Brazil Dilma Rousseff (1947, 2011, ousted from power in 2016 as a result of impeachment)
- President of the United States Donald Trump (1946, 2016).

It may strike one that there are more 'young' politicians in the West than in the conventional East, which may be explained by the authoritarian nature of Eastern regimes. In the West, withdrawal of the older generation and the energy of the political youth are much more noticeable. And this could be one of the main, though not publicly recognised, reasons for the absence of mutual understanding between them.

In one of his books, titled *The End of the World as We Know it: Social Science for the Twenty-first Century*, Immanuel Wallerstein wrote that the "modern world system as such entered the stage of terminating crisis and will hardly exist in fifty years. However, as the results of the crisis cannot be determined in advance, we do not know whether the replacing new system (or systems) is better or worse than the one we are living in" (Wallerstein, 2003, p. 5. Russian translation).

Such fears have always existed. The history of humankind is one geopolitical crisis after another, each leading to a change of world systems. There is no single concept of the world order. And it will not be built in the near future. The term multipolarity loses its magic.

The power of hypothetical poles is not absolute, it is transitory. And the great poles or powers will have to consider each particular situation in which the order is reshaped and take into account the interests of 'average' countries.

Globalisation does not eliminate contradictions but aggravates them. Globalisation will not create an ideal paradigm of human values that will satisfy everyone. Ethical, cultural, ideological, political, and finally civilisational interpretations will remain diverse, even incompatible, and they will compete amongst themselves. On the other hand, there will be no special national or 'civilisational' model of development, which is the dream of many countries now.

German analyst Peter Schulze wrote in his edited book *Multipolarity* that "the central question is whether the emerging multipolar order can provide security and welfare for the international community" (Peter W.Schulze, 2018, p.7).

And he honestly admits that he has no answer to that question. The said book has a symbolic subtitle, *The promise of disharmony*.

I am fetishising the age of politicians, but this circumstance cannot be ignored today. The next generation will have been born in the 21st century. What will remain in the memory of those who will become Presidents or Prime Ministers in twenty years? How will they perceive the recent past, when they celebrate, for example, the centennial of the end of World War II? And these are the people who will play the preferans of the multipolar world, or whatever it will be called.

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